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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: G-99 MOVEMENT LOOKS TO 2009 ELECTIONS FOR CHANGE

REF: TIRANA 399

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN WITHERS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In an October 22 meeting with Ambassador, Erion Veliaj, leader of the G-99 political movement, said the June 2009 elections are a "golden opportunity" for Albania to showcase its democratic progress. Veliaj said his movement, which aims at younger, more urban voters, has strong support and financial backing. He expects to gain a seat in Parliament and is working on a draft law to allow overseas Albanians to vote. He also sued PM Berisha's spokesman for slander and defamation on October 20. Veliaj is a young, suave politician who fancies himself as an agent for change; however it is not clear yet how many Albanians are convinced by his rhetoric or how well his message will sell with older and rural voters.
End summary.

¶2. (C) On October 22, Erion Veliaj, leader of the political movement G-99, told the Ambassador that he is "optimistic" about the political environment in Albania, adding that Albania has a "golden opportunity" with the June 2009 elections to demonstrate its commitment to democracy. Veliaj's G-99 arrived with a splash on the political scene in May with its vow to change politics as usual and revitalize Albania (reftel).

¶3. (C) G-99, according to Veliaj, is aimed primarily at middle class, urban, young, non-governmental, and first time voters. Veliaj hopes the post-Communist generation, which has no historical ties to Communism, will ignore claims from older leaders that "they rescued the country from Communism." G-99 is also focused on a law to allow Albanians abroad to vote in national elections. Veliaj claimed that financially, G-99 is in great shape, raising nearly USD 10,000 per month through small donations, most of which come from overseas. He differentiated G-99 from many of the other parties, saying that G-99 relies on the donations from members, and not on one rich person to fund the party.

¶4. (C) Veliaj also spoke briefly about his recent lawsuit in which he sued PM Sali Berisha's spokesman for defamation and libel. He challenged Berisha to produce any evidence to support his allegations that Veliaj has several villas and spent political donations on personal items. Veliaj said he filed this case in court in order to work within existing institutions and to demonstrate to the sometimes skeptical Albanian electorate that these institutions exist to right wrongs against citizens. Veliaj said the message he wants to send is clear: the PM is not above the law.

¶5. (C) Comment: Veliaj is a suave, urbane Albanian who has been educated in the U.S. and has worked in Central America and Africa. Many analysts have dismissed him due to his youth - he is only 28 - and his lack of experience. While it is too early to tell how his movement will fare in the 2009

elections, Veliaj, who has close ties to Socialist Party Leader Edi Rama, appears to be making an earnest attempt to shake up the status quo. It would be a mistake to underestimate

Veliaj - prior to creating G-99, he founded and built the NGO "Mjaft" into Albania's most successful and best known Civic-activist NGO. But whether or not voters will be interested in Veliaj's message remains to be seen.

WITHERS